

*“We strive to create  
the ULTIMATE  
OWNERSHIP  
EXPERIENCE.”*

Seen as a driving force in the automotive industry since the mid 70s, Ben Yeoh Choon San has transformed the Mazda brand in Malaysia.

WORDS HOLLY JOHNSON • IMAGES BERMAZ AUTO BERHAD

**W**ith more than 40 years of experience in the automotive industry, Ben Yeoh Choon San is well-known for his ability to turn a business around and deliver what others cannot. From 2000–07, he boosted sales and revamped Hyundai in Malaysia, and is now working that same magic on the Mazda brand as CEO and Executive Director of Bermaz Auto Berhad.

The company distributes a range of Mazda vehicles, spare parts and after-sales services through its own branches and more than 77 third-party dealers in Malaysia and the Philippines. Established in 2008, the Bermaz–Mazda partnership boosted the popularity of the Mazda brand in Malaysia, with sales growing from 1,000 to between 10,000 and 15,000 units per annum in the past 10 years. Ben’s pivotal role in this growth

earned him ‘Automotive Man of the Year 2013’ at the Car of the Year Awards, and he hasn’t slowed down since. “When we took over the Mazda business from Cycle & Carriage, we saw the opportunity to create local and regional manufacturing activities. Mazda shared this desire and was eager to capitalise on the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement. Together, we established a joint venture manufacturing company called Mazda Malaysia,” explains Ben. “Our biggest challenge was to create awareness and change people’s perceptions of the brand. I believe we were quite successful in growing the brand, and this is reflected in our sales up until last year.”

In September 2017, Bermaz Auto posted first-quarter earnings of RM20.2 million, down 50.8 per cent from the year before. Ben says the drop in revenue was mainly due to a weakened ringgit and lower domestic sales volume – particularly the CX-5 »



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# JRD

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JRD's subsidiary company Tokura Sdn. Bhd. in Malacca, Malaysia, uses Japan Technology. Tokura produces mechanical tubes for OEM, customers includes Kayaba, UMW, APM, UNION SANGYO, United Industries, and many more.

JRD has also diversified its business to Property Development (Residential, Commercial high rise and low rise and Hotels), holding many development projects throughout Malaysia.



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run-out model and ageing Mazda3 model – which faced intense competition from new models launched by competitors. “Many distributors were pressured to release and reduce their high inventories, which created massive discounting in the market,” explains Ben. He has managed to offset this lower profit by reducing operating costs and investing in the Philippines’ strong economic growth and buoyant demand for passenger cars.

“The current trend in the domestic Malaysian market shows strong demand for medium-sized SUVs and I believe our newest CX-5 will have a significant impact on profitability due to its premium features and design,” he notes. He believes the new model will be well-received by SUV buyers, just like the previous model. “The CX-5 is now being exported to Thailand and we will soon take it to the Philippines, Indonesia and other regional markets, which will bring the cost of local manufacturing down.”

Mazda Malaysia started at a low level and grew on the concept of innovative design, excellent build quality and advanced technology. Mazda’s brand essence is ‘Celebrate Driving’, aiming to brighten people’s lives through car ownership. “We strive to create the ultimate ownership experience. We have started a program where we provide drivers with a stress-free first three years of ownership. We offer free maintenance, home service and complete warranty coverage. As a result, our retention rate and CSI (Customer Satisfaction Index) rating is high, and we plan to keep improving it. In Malaysia, owning a car is expensive but essential as a means of transportation.

“We work in a disruptive environment where technology and consumer demands are always changing. In line with our vision to become a distributor of choice, we are focused on upskilling our human capital to stay ahead of trends in digital communication and technology.”

Ben is an ambassador for quality training for technicians in the Malaysian motor industry. As a result, Bermaz offers qualifications endorsed by the government and the IMI Awards, part of the Institute of

the Motor Industry. “The mission of this organisation is continuous development so that we can achieve the highest level of customer satisfaction. We run technical and soft-skills training programs, as well as three-year graduate programs where young people receive comprehensive classroom and on-the-job training,” he explains. “Our people are committed to a lifelong learning program that encourages them to continuously improve themselves. Every employee – including myself – is required to complete a minimum number of training hours. We run our own in-house training schools. The entire automotive industry is geared towards a future in environmentally friendly vehicles and green energy. Electric vehicles are expensive and require electric energy to charge their batteries, whether this electrical energy is produced from coal or more natural elements like solar and hydro-electricity,” says Ben.

Mazda chose an alternative route through its SKYACTIV technology – taking cars to the next level by redefining everything from the engine and transmission to the platform. “Together with Mazda, we are focused on endorsing the improved internal combustion engine – the cheapest and most popular option within the ASEAN market.” ■

At last year’s 45th Tokyo Motor Show, Mazda unveiled its new SKYACTIV-X SPCII engine, claiming to be the world’s first commercial gasoline engine to use compression ignition. Aimed at bridging the gap between petrol and electric vehicles, the engine combines characteristics of both petrol and diesel engines to improve efficiency.